COMIC TALK #16 • OCTOBER 1993 • $2.50

COMIC TALK™

DARICK ROBERTSON TALKS ABOUT EXCALIBUR!

EXCALIBUR © 1993 MARVEL COMICS

ISSUE #16

COMIC TALK™

Volume 1 - Number 16 - October 1993

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Printed in the U.S.A

INTRODUCTION:

In just a few short years, Darick Robertson has created a niche for himself in the forefront of a crowd of talented young artists who are making their mark on the comics scene.

The 24-year old Robertson has established himself as a solid action artist with a gift for dynamic layouts, in such books as Justice League Europe, Wolverine and The New Warriors.

He has designed, or helped design, many of the new characters appearing for Ultraverse's The Solution (written by James Hudnall--insuring a level of writing more or less commensurate with Robertson's excellent work.)

In the last several months, Robertson has gained even more respect in the world of pro comics by doing a couple of emergency pencil jobs in addition to his regular New Warriors gig. Not only is he good, he is the comic artist version of The Flash. (The Flash, coincidentally, is the character that brought him into comics fandom.)

When I spoke with him, Robertson had finished the pencils for *The Solution* #2. We talked about his evolution as an artist from childhood to the present. We discussed everything from his first pro work (Space Beaver) and his current work on *New Warriors* and *The Solution*, to his emergency fill-in work.

Finally, we covered his plans for the future: two very intriguing projects that are being developed for Malibu.

Like all interviews, this one has its digressions and non sequiturs. Like most interviews with intelligent, talented people, it was a lot of fun for the interviewer.

Sheldon Wiebe

DARICK:

Sheldon Wiebe: Best thing to do would be to get the personal stuff out of the way. You know, where you're from, age, when you thought you might become a comics artist, or when you first realized that you could draw and people would look at it and go, "Wow!" That sort of thing.

Darick Robertson: That started for me really young. I was a very shy kid in a lot of ways. A lot of people that meet me now don't believe me, but I had a hard time excelling at anything else. A lot of kids have sports and things like that that they can do. I could write these little stories and draw pictures to go with them and they would hang them up in the window at my school. People would come by and look at them and they really liked them so I kind of got that little rub going there. I used to draw all the time because it was just something I had to do, like an escape, and I used to really enjoy it. So I started at a very young age. I didn't discover comic books until I was in fifth grade--it was a copy of *The Flash* #276, and it had this great Jose Garcia Lopez cover on it, a cover you'd probably never see today but it was very cool then, it was like 1970, and there were like three guys on a unicycle, three guys balancing on a unicycle on an electrical wire and they were going to get killed and the Flash was frozen. I thought that was pretty cool because I loved the anatomy that Jose Garcia Lopez had put in this pose. There was so much power and movement and everything that I picked up the comic and I was just fascinated. I opened it up and I felt like I could run with the Flash. I was looking at the Flash, feeling I could like live his life and deal with these powers and it was a really great gateway to a whole other world of my imagination. So that sucked me in right away.

"I USED TO DRAW ALL THE TIME BECAUSE IT WAS JUST SOMETHING I HAD TO DO LIKE AN ESCAPE."

SW: That's when you became a comics fan?

DR: And when I started wanting to draw comics, yeah. I started right then, and even though I was in fifth grade I knew that that's what I wanted to do. I started to collect *The Flash*. I started collecting a lot of things. I was drawing like crazy too. I started drawing my own comic books. I was drawing them on typing paper and stapling them together.

SW: Was there any artist that leapt off the page more than others?

DR: At the time, like I said, Jose Garcia Lopez, and Neal Adams. The Neal Adams images of Batman and Superman were...to me that's just the way they were drawn. There was no other real way. Everyone else was a variation on that. Neal Adams was definitely a huge influence on my early beginnings.

SW: Actually, I think there's still something of a hint of that in your work now.

DR: Of Neal Adams?

SW: Yeah, there's that sort of that dynamic motion thing.

DR: That's one of the things I've always loved about him. He's always been great at powerful poses and his anatomy is so flawless.

SW: Except when he wants to make it different just to make a point.

DR: Right.

SW: He knows the rules. And he knows when to break them.

DR: Exactly. He knows when to break the rules and how to exaggerate on reality. That's one thing I've always tried to keep in my work, the same thing that's he's had that I've admired. I still consider him a major influence, him and Brian Bolland..

SW: Very, very clean fine line work.

DR: Yeah, just that and the very

expressive figures. A very definite feeling of light and shade. Also Art Adams was a huge influence on me as well, like after I started to get into Marvel stuff because I loved the dynamics and the detail of everything. Everything was detailed. It was a weird merger, but I see it in my work. I kind of go with like Brian Bolland's line work and Arthur Adams's proportion, I guess.

SW: One of the notes I made when I was looking through the books was the clean, fine line style, not as baroque as George Perez or Art Adams, but certainly ornate in a controlled, less cluttered fashion.

DR: That's interesting.

SW: So I kind of picked up on that.

DR: Yeah. George Perez I always really loved too, but I never really tried to mimic him as much as I just admired him.

SW: So how did you go about preparing...I mean from the age of five this becomes the most important thing--you want to draw comics.

DR: Yeah, a lot of it was kind of funny because I didn't really consider that this was going to be my career. I was just always obsessed with doing it but I wanted to be a lawyer.

SW: Oh my.

DR: Yeah, isn't that strange? I wanted to be a lawyer really badly and I was doing everything I could then to learn about how to become a lawyer. I was a very driven child. [laughs] Even at eight I'm like, I got to be a lawyer, so I must have taken whatever law classes they offered in middle school. In the process somebody actually made a joke to me about how you gonna draw comics, or how are you gonna draw your comics and be a lawyer? It's like you're going to be defending somebody who's on trial for murder and you're not going to be paying attention because you're going to be busy drawing on your note pad. And I went, yeah, that's right. I probably would. It really was like a reality check for me. It was like, yeah I guess maybe...maybe I should do this. Maybe I should just try to be an artist.

"I WAS DOING EVERYTHING I COULD THEN TO LEARN HOW TO BECOME A LAYWER. I WAS A VERY DRIVEN CHILD.(LAUGHS)"

I never thought about the possibility of that until that moment, but from then on it was like, well, that's what I'm going to do.

The first step, I guess, was I bought everything I could find that would teach me how to draw correctly. I bought *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*. I bought books on how to draw anatomy. I bought the try-out book. Anything that would teach me the proper way of getting in, that's what I would buy and I would try to learn it religiously. I worked at that very hard and I ended up meeting a security guard that was drawing. One day he was like doing little doodles on his note pad, really good though, like really great Manga style stuff, and he actually was working with a small company named Victory and he said that he could get me probably published with them. I was like maybe 17 at that point. Anything I could get published by them would be fine. Just to be published period would be great. So I got all my work together and submitted a bunch of stuff and they wanted to do this thing that I had drawn on typing paper like a lot of the other comics I had done. They wanted to do this thing called Space Beaver that I had come up with. So I submitted that and they liked it and they said well if you do the art, we'll publish it. We can't pay you because we can't afford to. It was going to be like an eight-page feature in the back of this book (which never even came out), but I was just happy to have the opportunity for exposure so I jumped on it and I started working on the art. This little comic book store owner, Tibor Sardy, he saw the art and he goes, "Wow, this is really terrific," and this is during the black-and-white boom. It was black-and-white funny animal art and although they weren't funny, it was a strange story. He says, "I think this is really great. I'll pub-

lish you and we'll pay you and give you your own book." And I went, great. So I pulled out of the Victory deal and we started Ten Buck Comics and I did eleven issues of Space Beaver which I wrote and drew and painted the covers and inked myself and did everything. I got paid very little money, but there wasn't a lot of money to go around. I think he's still in debt for that. [laughs] We did what we could to get it off the ground. We got a small following but the best thing that it did was that it got me going to conventions, and after going to a lot of conventions I started to meet people and get exposed and I started to figure out how to submit artwork to editors and things like that. Eventually I ended up going to an agent after all this walking up to editors and getting patted on the back and then turned away. I ended up hiring Mike Friedrich to take my work out to New York and I got a job within the first two weeks.

"ANYTHING I COULD GET PUBLISHED BY THEM WOULD BE FINE." "JUST TO BE PUBLISHED PERIOD WOULD BE GREAT."

SW: Well, that was a good move, because Mike is one of the most respected people in the business.

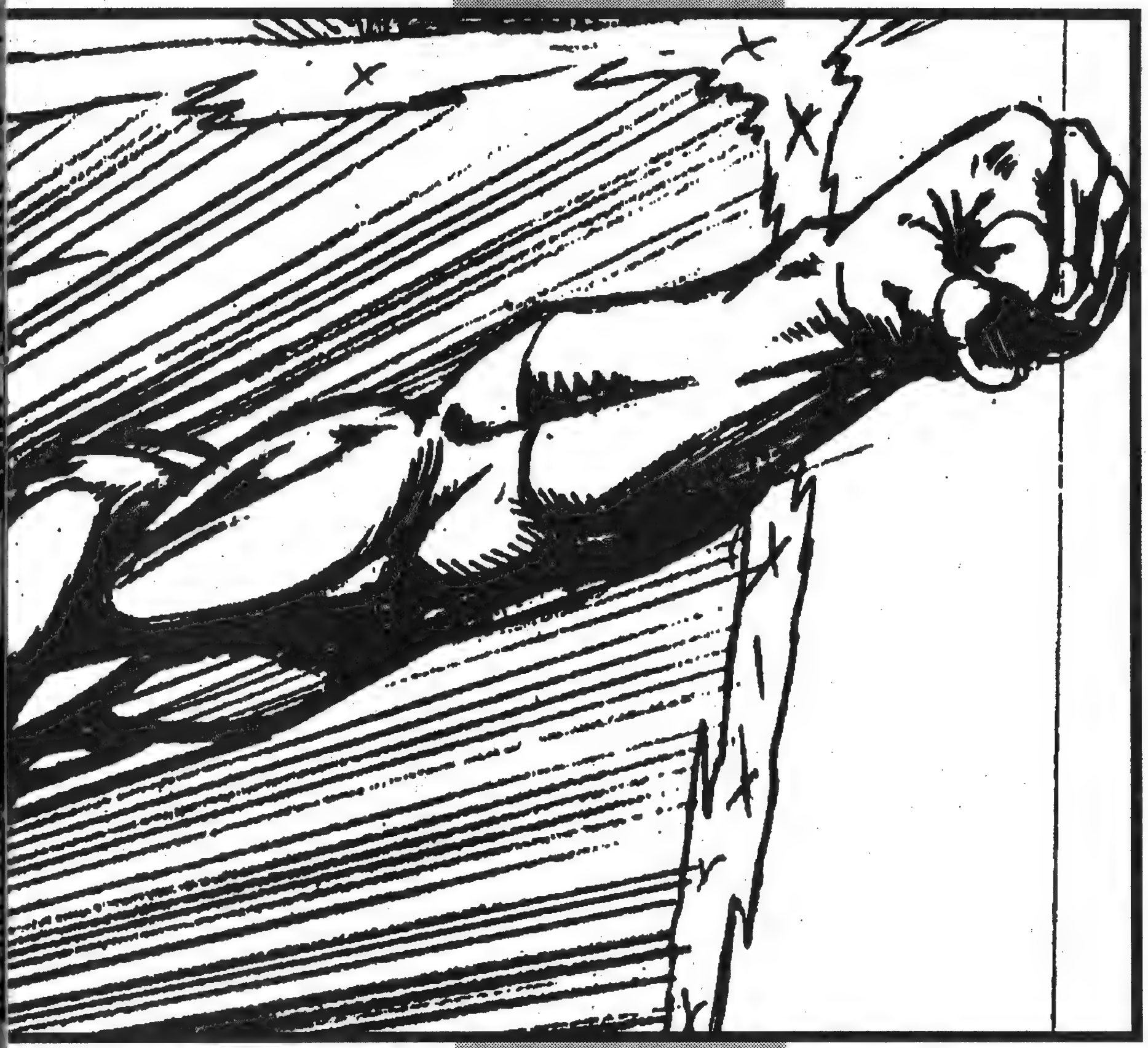
DR: Mike is very good for getting people in. I'm actually no longer represented by him, but I still appreciate what he's done. It just got to the point as an agent he couldn't really do anything more because it was happening on its own at that point. I had monthly work and then more work was coming from people I would meet. But getting me in, he was very helpful.

SW: Did you do anything else besides buying all these books to learn

from? Did you take any classes or anything like that?

DR: No. Other than art school. I had a really great teacher in art school who gave me a great piece of advice. He was a professional gallery artist. It was always kind of to his chagrin that I was doing comic books because I guess he thought I could be more than that. I couldn't make him see that to me comics are their own form of fine art--illustrative stories, you know, being able to draw and tell a story and invoke emotion. I think it's a real achievement, if you can do it right. I always remember dramatic moments, especially like George Perez in *Titans*, he had a couple of dramatic moments that he illustrated that were actually like emotion evoking, and I think it's a real accomplishment to do that with a flat page. I couldn't get him to see this though, and he would say, "Oh, you should give that up. You should concentrate more on this." Him being a gallery artist, fine art meant a lot to him. One day he finally, he kind of met me halfway. I said, "Well I want to draw comics," and he said, "Well, look if you can draw comics, be the best comics artist you can be. Don't be a half-baked cartoonist. Don't go half way with it. Study everything. Try to put everything into your work all the time. Be an artist within your work." I always felt that that was really...poignant, and that stuck with me. I thought that it was important to remember that it's not just a job. This is my art even though I don't have an artsy style or anything, or that I think

ON HIS FIRST COMIC: "WE GOT A SMALL FOLLOWING BUT THE BEST THING THAT IT DID WAS THAT IT GOT ME INTO CONVENTIONS."



that I'm an artist, but I still thought that it's a good rule of thumb so I don't lose focus on why I'm doing this. I work like crazy and I put a lot into it and sometimes it's easy to forget that it's more than a job. I'm very fortunate to have this as my life.

SW: To be able to do something that you enjoy.

DR: Something I really love.

SW: And get paid for it.

DR: Right. I got into this thinking I was going to be flat broke all the time, but I said it doesn't matter because I'd be happy. And I am happy and luckily enough I'm not flat broke.

SW: Funny how that works when you have a certain amount of talent.

DR: Well, I don't think it was as easy to make a living at this 20 years ago.

SW: This is true.

"I THOUGHT THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT IT'S NOT JUST A JOB. THIS IS MY ART EVEN THOUGH I DON'T HAVE ANY ARTSY STYLE OR ANYTHING."

DR: Then in the mid-'80s we had a swell, but even in the '80s it was still a different ball game altogether. Now with all these other companies starting up and with more knowledge than all the previous independent companies that preceded them, I think we're seeing a whole new era in comic book publishing. I think right now we're witnessing the publisher wars.

SW: Do you think when the smoke clears there's still going to be a good solid number of things that survive?

DR: I do. I think Dark Horse is here to stay. I think Malibu has enough savvy to know exactly what to do with their Ultraverse line and already we've seen signs of success from that. From what I've seen of the product that's coming out in the future from them, it just gets better. They've

got more people coming over and stuff, so I think Malibu's going to be a force to be reckoned with. In that regard alone, I'm hoping Image will stay around just because I like the way they put a fire under everybody.

SW: Whether you like what they're doing or not, there's things happening, sparks are flying.

DR: They really shook things up. At first I got kind of dismayed by it because I thought they were doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons, but it got everybody motivated and I really like that. I like seeing DC kind of snap out of its doldrums. I like seeing Marvel starting to change their policies. So they accomplished a lot and I respect that. They managed to change the industry. You have all these new companies following their lead. It's pretty impressive. I hate to see them fail, although I understand they're having some troubles, but I'd hate to see them go belly up.

SW: You mentioned earlier that you figured Malibu pretty much knew how to handle things with the Ultraverse and, of course, you're going to be doing some work for them. How do you go from *Space Beaver* to Malibu? The thing with Mike FrIederich, was that where you got into doing stuff with DC?

DR: Yeah, basically. I had been working for Innovation when I met Mike and I did three issues of *Child's Play II*.

SW: I think that's the first thing I saw by you. I rather liked those books.

DR: Thank you. I appreciate that. I put a lot of work into them and I was lucky enough to find something I could really expand with. I was itching to draw people after drawing *Space Beaver*, so getting that job was really good. I had done four issues of Patchy_Dick as well for Eternity for their Trouble With Girls spinoff.

SW: With *Child's Play*, I understand that Andy Mangles writes incredibly detailed scripts.

DR: I don't remember it being anything I couldn't deal with. I actually enjoyed working with Andy quite a bit.

SW: He's a good guy.

DR: Yeah, he is. He's a great guy. His script was very thorough, but I never found it constricting. It was easier for me to visualize what he wanted, considering we were both working from a movie that I had only seen briefly. They screened it for us and they let us have a lot of stills but Universal wouldn't let us have a copy of the movie to work from. I kind of had to just guess. If I had had a copy of the movie I would have done it frame by frame. I would have drawn it just like you were seeing it on the screen. I always thought that movie adaptations should be artistic interpretations of the images of the film, but they wouldn't let us do that. They lent me a trailer and I did a page for that. But I'm getting off the subject, sorry. Andy's a really good guy to work with and yes, his scripts were very detailed.

SW: Okay, so from there you go to Justice League. Now what was the situation like there?

DR: That was really good actually, but it went bad at the end. I was really excited about Justice League. I was a huge fan of the book at the time, and I love Kevin McGuire's and Adam Hughes' art so I was really thrilled to get a chance to work on that. That's like the one DC that I would have wanted to work on anyway. Except maybe for Batman. So getting right to the book that I wanted to do was like a dream come true. Andy was really great to work with and I turned in a few issues. I did the quarterly and then he said why don't you do fill-ins on Europe and I said great. I had done some of the annual that year and he then said when the book is done, or when you finish these seven issues, it's yours. You'll take over as the monthly artist. I said terrific. Then he said there was

"I THINK DARK HORSE IS HERE TO STAY. I THINK MALIBU HAS ENOUGH SAVVY TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TO DO WITH THEIR ULTRAVERSE LINE."

an editorial change, I'm stepping down and Brian Augustyn taking over. He goes, I've already talked to Brian and there's no problem. He doesn't see any problem with you staying on the book. I was like, okay, terrific. But apparently he had been talking to Mike Friedrich and Mike wasn't so sure, and then as soon as Andy stepped down Brian basically said, you're not ready to handle a monthly book--even after I had turned in seven issues on time--that I wasn't ready to handle a monthly book. That was the last...I never got any more work from him.

SW: That's too bad. How did you wind up going from there to Wolverine?

DR: Luckily enough I met Jeff Johnson, who's one of my best friends, and he introduced me to Fabian. Fabian introduced me to Bob at the Oakland convention and I just started talking to Bob and Bob said, bring your work by tomorrow. I'd showed him what I had been doing on Justice League and he gave me a tryout on Wolverine. He liked my tryouts enough to give me the issue. After that I followed it up with two more and then I got work from Fabian, who's also been one of my friends in the industry, and he ended up talking Danny Fingeroth into hiring me for New Warriors, and I've been on that ever since.

SW: You've done quite a lot of characters, so that must be very interesting.

DR: Yeah, I've had a lot to enjoy. It's been nice with all sorts of guest star appearances in the both issues. I got to draw almost everybody in Justice League, including Lobo, and then I got to draw Wolverine who is also my favorite at Marvel. So I've had a lot of variety. My favorite still though is the Elongated Man. I sure would love to do an Elongated Man story. That's one of the main reasons I enjoyed working on Justice League, to draw him and Blue Beetle. I thought Blue Beetle was cool because he was the only fat super-hero. But they immediately put him back in shape.

SW: Yeah, well, these things happen. So now it comes to Malibu. Now you've been doing New Warriors for...

DR: I guess about 25 issues.

SW: And an annual, and having a good time with yet another group book.

DR: Yeah. People seem to think that that's what I enjoy. That's mostly what I've been offered. I've been told that I look like a team book kind of guy. The only thing I do like about team books is that you can fill the panels with characters as opposed to background, and I like looking at the characters when I read a comic as opposed to an office, or a city, or whatever. You could fill up a whole panel with different-sized characters and the composition is a real challenge and that's a lot of the fun. When I got a chance to do Cable I was really excited, and also Wolverine, because I could focus on one character. I like doing that because I develop a feel for the character after working on him so many times.

SW: You mentioned Cable. Now *Cable* #5 hasn't hit the stands yet so I haven't seen it, but as one of the 'X' books, that's got to help your reputation.

DR: Yeah. I think it has a lot of pull, at least with other people considering me for jobs. I don't have people questioning whether or not I'm ready for a monthly book anymore because I have those on the resume. Although it's kind of ironic, because I thought some of my best work at the time was for the Wonder Man annual, but mostly what people like fans remember is Wolverine and they immediately respond to that and I only did three issues. It's nice, I really liked working on Wolverine, and with

"I WAS COMPLETELY INFATUATED WITH THE X-MEN. I SAW THEM ON A VERY PERSONAL LEVEL."

Fabian being the writer. There's more projects in the works of X-Men stuff, but I don't know if I'll ever get to be an X-Man artist, but it would be nice.

SW: Well, from the point of view of income it's rewarding. Also there's a challenge because they have so many characters and they go through different combinations every issue, it seems.

DR: I like those characters a lot. When I was a teenager and growing up that's the book I was reading. I was completely infatuated with the X-Men. I saw them on a very personal level. I saw them very much as people as opposed to super-heroes, and they really intrigued me. I liked the way Wolverine was dealing with this inner demon. I liked the way that Nightcrawler, was a complete outcast because of his appearance and everybody was horrified by him and he had to live that way. And Rogue was my favorite. This is why this upcoming project with Marvel is really exciting to me, because I've always loved Rogue. I always wanted to be the person that would draw, or help create, Rogue's origin, because I loved the idea of this girl living in a bubble, this girl that can't be touched, this girl that's a constant prisoner, and it kind of bothers me that she's gone in the direction she has...lately Fabian's been doing some great stuff with her and Gambit, which I like, but before that for a long period of time she'd hang out in bikinis and laugh, and she was this really happy, well-adjusted girl. To me it's like I would think she'd be miserable. When she first showed up and Paul Smith dealt with her, at least artistically, and Chris Claremont was writing her, she was very shy and she had this short, kind of slicked-back hair and she looked like a very innocent girl. She would keep to herself and stand off to one side and look shy and awkward. I thought that was more interesting because she was so powerful.

SW: And it was kind of a contrast to the way she would obtain the other person's powers when she touched someone, the idea of this shy girl suddenly becoming this real fury, the kiss of death almost.

DR: Right, exactly. So I thought that was a really interesting angle, and then she kind of just became bikini wearing...

SW: Hot babe.

DR: And it's fine, but the character had to evolve. When Fabian and I do this *X-Men Unlimited*, we're going to do Rogue's origin, I'm going to help write it and I'm really excited about that.

SW: What kind of time frame are we looking at for this?

DR: I think #6, so probably next summer.

SW: Still a distance away, unfortunately.

DR: Yeah, quite a ways. I have to finish *Warriors* and a couple of the other projects I'm working on first before we get really into that, but I'm still excited about it so I wanted to talk about it. But I've always really loved those characters.

SW: It also makes a nice teaser for people. They'll see this and say, "Oh, next year there's going to be a Rogue origin." Cool.

DR: Yeah, and we're going to give a lot of information, too, which should be pretty enlightening. We're going to really go into her past, find out what her real name is, how she came to be with Mystique, and what her time with Gambit is. I'm pretty excited about it.

SW: Good. So you've been doing *New Warriors*. You've got something happening with Rogue. Where did the split-off come where the path moved to one side to also include the Ultraverse?

DR: Well, ironically enough, about six months before the Ultraverse stuff came around Steve Englehart called me and wanted to work with me on a DC project where I would help design a character and help him create this guy for a mini-series he was going to do. It was pretty interesting but apparently they never got off the ground. I was really busy at the time and I couldn't really put a lot of work into the design and I was getting very little feedback from the editor of the project. I didn't even know what was happening half the time and nothing happened with it. About six months later Steve called me again and said, "There's a new company starting up. If I told you that it was going to mean more benefits and pay and it would be a better project, would you be willing to leave Marvel for it?" I said, "Well I'm interested but without more information I really couldn't say. I like working at Marvel, and it would have to be pretty enticing if I was going to walk away from that." He said, "Well I can't give you a lot of information now, but basically this is what's happening." And he said he wanted me to help him develop the series for a new company, and I'd find out soon enough who they were. Everything was very secret and I didn't understand, but now in retrospect I do. They wanted to announce it with big fanfare. So as it came out it was Malibu and he wanted me to help him design the Nightman. Steve Englehart actually brought me over to Malibu and introduced me to the Ultraverse people and I designed Night_Man for him and I also designed the Strangers. Rick Hoberg came in and redesigned two of them, and made one of them younger, but basically kept my costumes. So I ended up doing a lot of design work for him. But things didn't work out. I don't want to go into it because then it looks like I'm spreading rumors.

SW: Those old creative differences?

DR: Yeah, basically. Although I really enjoy the character of Nightman

ON X-MEN'S ROGUE:

"SHE WOULD KEEP TO HERSELF AND STAND OFF TO ONE SIDE AND LOOK SHY AND AWKWARD. I THOUGHT THAT WAS MORE INTERESTING BECAUSE SHE WAS SO POWERFUL."

and I was very proud of the design and the contributions I made, I really wanted to take it in a different direction than Steve wanted to. I think that was the real essence of the split up. Steve had something in mind that he wanted to do with it and I had to respect that. I had to stop and go, well, this isn't my character, although I did have a lot to do with getting it off the ground and his look and everything. But this isn't my character...I don't want to tread on his territory because he'd been wanting to do this particular story for a long time so I just figured it was better if I bow out and do my own thing. That's basically what I'm doing.

SW: So how did it go from there to *the Solution*?

DR: Well, that kind of came as a fluke. Chris Wozniak ended up getting a lot of Image work and left the book before the first issue was completed and he had turned in some work but very little. They called me up and asked me if I would do it, because I guess they knew I was sitting with nothing to do from Malibu. So they gave me *the Solution* with Jim Hudnall. Jim Hudnall knows an old friend of mine so I was really excited to work with him because we never really had a chance to draw or work on a project together before. I really enjoy it. I think it's one of the best books I've drawn. I really love the script. I love the characters. I had a chance to do some really dynamic artwork. I previously have been dealing with too much story. I've really been able to do buffed-out, strong images in this book. I really enjoyed it. I think it's an interesting character. I think these are interesting characters being basically super-hero mercenaries that don't have a right or wrong motive.

SW: Why don't you tell us a little bit about the book.

DR: Solution is four characters. The leader is a Japanese woman who's been...I don't know everything because Jim's writing this and this is just what I've gathered from reading his three plots that I've gotten. But the Japanese woman who leads them is named Tech. She's apparently got computer stuff in her skull so that she can link up with computers mentally. She also carries a lot of weapons and things like that. She's very cool, cool as in cool-headed. Her business was taken away from her by white collar crime and corporate take-over, and she's lost her family business. She was a corporate head and now she's on the fringes. She's trying to get it back from the Japanese underworld. As part of a way of getting it back she started up this mercenary organization. She hired a guy by the name of Dropkick; I have no idea what his past is. We're going to deal with that in issue #5, but Dropkick is like basically a martial artist who's bionically enhanced. He's got tons of wetware in his body. I think he's like packing bionic limbs, making him an incredible martial artist. He's got ways of channeling chi power and things like that. The other character's name is Shadowmage and she's like an elfmage from another dimension, from the elf dimension or from a fantasy world. She writes runes onto her hands and creates powers that way. She'll write the rune sign for fire and then she can blast fire at someone. She's kind of interesting because she looks like she never quite fits with the rest of the group. The fourth member is a guy named *Vurk* who's an alien. *Vurk* walks around in the human form but he's got gray skin, red eyes, and pointed ears. He's kind of the Wolverine/Lobo of the group. What he is is a Darkurian and in the Ultraverse in the storyline these are a race of people that can morph into these hideous monsters. They change into just about anything you can imagine, usually grotesque. So he's got a demon form that he morphs

ON THE SOLUTION:

"I REALLY ENJOY IT. I THINK IT'S ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS I'VE DRAWN. I REALLY LOVE THE SCRIPT. I LOVE THE CHARACHTERS."

into called Outrage and that's kind of like his code name. So he morphs into this horrible thing with claws and tentacles and teeth and the whole deal, and he's really frightening, bu he's also driven by...Jim's got a Klingon kind of honor system happening among the Darkurians. Apparently they're all pretty bad for our planet but this guy has actually switched sides and for some reason or other is motivated to be good and not just mindlessly murder people. He just mindlessly murders bad guys. But there's a whole other mercenary group that has another Darkurian amongst them that they take on in the first issue. Like I said, it's very exciting. The stuff is very interesting and well thought-out and everybody's got a mysterious past that we're going to go into. Most comic books I read these days don't have any interesting characters at all. But with the Ultraverse stuff they're actually trying to give you characters you'd want to read about.

ON *VURK*: "HE'S KIND OF THE WOLVERINE/ LOBO OF THE GROUP"

SW: It's not assembly line.

DR: Right. And if you like it or hate it, you've got to respect that they're accomplishing that.

SW: You're going to be doing five issues of *the Solution*?

DR: Yeah, I'm contracted to do the five. I'm on the second one now. The first one's done and ready to go to press. I got into this late because like I said they had Chris Wozniak originally scheduled for it and he backed out leaving me only two weeks to do the first issue.

SW: How many pages did he leave

you?
DR: Twenty-eight. I had to do the whole thing over.
SW: Whew. Had to start over? Nothing was salvageable?
DR: I did it right before San Diego. I've been doing this huge glut of work in the last two months. I've been like haggard because I've been doing so much work. I did *Cable #5* in two weeks, while doing issue #40 of *New Warriors*, finished issue #40 of *New Warriors*, started on #41, ended up taking on *Solution* and did that in two weeks, plus I did 12 pages of *Excalibur* and finished #41 just the other day.
SW: So you've got the reputation for being the Flash of artists.
DR: Yeah I'm the fast guy, and they like the work too when I turn it in. They like the quality and they also know that I can do it really quick, so I keep getting told I'm another Ron Lim.
SW: Oh please, not that!
DR: Hopefully they mean speed-wise, but I like Ron.
SW: Working with Jim, how is that going?
DR: Very well. In fact, Jim and I have a past, mostly a lot of mutual friends that have worked with him. Very rarely do I actually know the writer I'm working with before actually working with him, with the exception of maybe Fabian. Most of the time it's like you just meet him and then you work together. With Jim I actually met him at conventions and things like that and I had gone over to his house when we were in L.A., and he's friends with a lot of my friends so I knew him. It was great because we share a common interest in things like Charlie Chan movies and martial arts films and other things. He turned me onto a lot of them. A lot of that we're putting into *the Solution*. So working with him was really great. We already kind of had a repertoire.
SW: Something to draw on.
DR: Yeah, we already had an open communication anyway, so it wasn't awkward, and getting to know each other wasn't really necessary. We already knew where to go and I could be open with him and talk to him about my ideas, and he's receptive to them. It's been really great. I like working with Jim a lot. He's one of the best writers I've worked with and I think he's very talented and underrated as well.
SW: I would have to agree with that. I've talked with him for the late great original *AMAZING HEROES* for the Previews specials a number of times, and it always struck me that his books, the characters, were always fun and the stories always maintained that basic, internal logic that you've got to have to make the comic believable. I mean once you get past the long johns and the super-powers, there has to be a certain logic to it. Then of course the plots have to...they say there are no new plots, but there are lots of inter-

" MOST COMIC BOOKS I READ THESE DAYS DON'T HAVE ANY INTERESTING CHARACHTERS AT ALL. BUT WITH THE ULTRAVERSE STUFF THEY'RE ACTUALLY TRYING TO GIVE YOU CHARACHTERS YOU'D WANT TO READ ABOUT."

esting variations and it seems that he can do that. I would assume that that's what he'll bring to *the Solution.*

doesn't get it. He just doesn't understand why it has to be a better style now. We can't do comics like we did in 1975, it doesn't work.

DR: I think so. The thing that I really like about *Solution* and one of the things I was trying to hammer through to Steve Englehart when we were doing *Nightman* together, is that Steve had some really great ideas but I felt his execution was too old style. Like, originally, when he first brought it to me, he said he wanted me to plot it out with him. Then he said, I want to have Johnny Domino walking out of the hospital. That's the splash page. Okay so you're a 14-year old kid now, you got competition on the stands--there's Image, Marvel. Excitement, you know? You open the first issue of this new comic book *Nightman* and what do you get? You got a guy that you don't know, you really don't care about because you have no idea who he is, walking out of a hospital. Page two would have him walking out in the street. Who cares? You put it back on the stand immediately no matter how well it was drawn or written. It just doesn't work that way. You gotta kind of give them some splash. And Steve got offended when I told him this. He tried to alter it for me and then we ended up changing it into a guy leaping off a building. I told you about the dialogue, right? So we'll leave that out of the interview because I don't want to insult him anymore than I already have. He just

SW: It's like rock 'n' roll. You need a hook.

DR: Exactly. And Steve wants to go back, I think, to doing those kinds of comics and it just doesn't work. In my opinion it doesn't work. What Jim wanted to do, which is exactly what I tried to sell Steve on (we... both kind of came up with similar theories separately) is we looked at comics and said, look why can't we have this great splashy Image stuff that does work. It's exciting and it's fun to look at, and you like it, and you want to pick it up. See I don't look at comics anymore like a 24-year old professional in the business. I try to look at them like my audience does, which is generally going to be young children, like 14--guys that are looking for some excitement and escape. What do they want to see? What did I want to see at 14? I think about that. And it doesn't mean we can't tell them a good story. It doesn't mean they can't learn or get into the character just because it's splashy. So we found a way, I think, Jim and I, that we could do really good stories but have this dynamic, expressive art with good backgrounds and exciting people. So we can have the best of both worlds, we're like trying to merge Image and Vertigo, if we can. That's what I want to do.

"WE CAN'T DO COMICS LIKE WE DID IN 1975, IT DOESN'T WORK."

SW: That's a jarring combination.
DR: Yeah, it is kind of strange, but that's what I'm hoping to do with

DR: Exactly. There's something major at stake. They're basically trying to stop mercenaries who are stealing

more of the projects I've got coming down the line, trying to meld Image and Vertigo, having really good stories, fast-paced action, and you're really going to care about the characters. You're going to want to know what's happening, and you're going to be learning about the characters as opposed to just seeing pointless fight scenes--everything's serving a purpose. In the first issue alone all the fight scenes that you see serve a Purpose. You're finding out who these people are, and there is a reason why they're fighting. There is something going on; they're not just taking on other people because they have powers too.

SW: There's something at stake.

nuclear weapons from the Russians, bankrupt communist Russia. These super-powered mercenaries, they're going in there and they're stealing them with their powers. They're killing off soldiers and taking all the nukes and selling them off to a powerful businessman. It's like giving nuclear weapons to private interests. Pretty scary.

SW: That's not comic book stakes as Peter David would put it.

DR: So those are concepts, but you're getting fed this through action scenes. You're seeing the whole battle. You're seeing the weapons being stolen. You're seeing the KGB and the CIA work this out. You're seeing what *the Solution's* involvement in

"I REALLY LIKE THIS. I READ THE STORY AND I WENT,"WOW, I CARE ABOUT THIS."

all this is, and why the CIA has hired them to stop these guys. It's really interesting. I really like this. I read the story and I went, "Wow. I care about this." At first I was like, I was very disgruntled about Nightman and I just took Solution because I wanted, I needed something to fill the void that I had scheduled in for that work. So when they said, well, will you do this for five issues, and then we'll let you do your own thing, and they were going to anyway, they weren't just dangling it like a carrot, I took it as, well I'll just take the job. No big deal. But once I started reading it and getting into it, I really liked it. I'm really excited and proud of the work I'm doing.

SW: With *the Solution* is this being put together in the, pardon the expression, Marvel-style, where you take the plot and do the breakdowns and then there's scripting?

DR: I work full-pencilled from the plot, and then Jim goes back and he scripts it. Jim writes in full script but he dialogues afterwards anyway just to make sure that with anything that got changed or altered, the words fit the picture.

SW: So it's kind of semi-full script, and then fine-tuning on the dialogue?

DR: Right. He'll tell me how many panels he wants on the page, but he thinks ahead, which I really like. Steve would offer me panels on a page, most of them would be six or five or eight, and that makes a very cramped page. He knows where I have this image and that's going to need a lot of room so I'll make this a three panel page. If it's a fight scene, I'll make this a three panel page. And it would work out perfectly, and that way I can do these big, explosive images and yet we told the story and we kept the pacing. He tells me what's happening in each panel and then I go from there. If I can think of something better or a variation or whatever he's always open to suggestions. Sometimes when a writer sees something visually, he doesn't always see it on the page. I get the feeling from working with Fabian and Jim and a lot of other writers, they see things like in a movie in their head. When I draw a page or when I write a comic book story, I see it as a finished comic book page and I've always seen it that way. I have a hard time seeing it like a movie. I see it like a comic book completed, what would look really good on this page and that's how I visualize it.

SW: Do you have any input in terms of the actual plots?

DR: Well, he's got the first three already written, so not really. I've kind of had my own hand in just developing the characters in the way how I see them interacting. With Shadow mage, although it's not stated in the script, I see her as a shy, hesitant person except when she's in battle, but even then she's very quiet and calm, which I think makes for an interesting character because you're so used to everybody screaming and gritting their teeth.

SW: Or wise-cracking.

DR: Or wise-cracking, exactly. She doesn't do these things. She just kind of goes about her business.

SW: She does her job.

DR: Yeah, I kind of feel, like a cat. You know how a cat is?

SW: Cats are sort of I'm here, if you like it fine, if you don't who needs you.

DR: Right exactly, but she's not aloof as much as she is just hesitant. She's not a very forceful person. It's just kind of like the way Jim paints her into background or into the scenarios too, whereas I see Tech as very cool and cocky and she's very self-assured, but also with a very friendly edge to her. I like her because she's a very strong woman character and she leads the team, and I think that it's important to show people like that, in the '90s. I always thought, when I first got the book, I thought this guy Dropkick led them and I was like who cares, but I was really interested when I found out that he's just kind of like hired help and that she's the real brains and driving force behind the team. Drop kick, he's kind of like...the urge is to make him like the boy scout of the team, but I really don't want to because I think he's more interesting if he's got his own little dark edge too, that he's tainted. He's got him working as a mercenary so I can't imagine him being too nice. Vurk is very much like the Wolverine, the Lobo character of the team. He's this big, burly, skullking character, he's al-

ways got a scowl on his face, always brooding.

SW: Loose cannon.

DR: Very loose cannon, but he's neat that way and it works. Again Jim does enough with it so it's not like we're just throwing him in as the Lobo or Wolverine stand-in. It's not like we had a little void and said paste Lobo character here. He actually serves a role and a particular purpose on the team and he has a past that I think is pretty interesting. He's not just there for comic relief or action relief so to speak.

SW: It sounds actually from the description that you gave earlier that he's got probably millennia of history to live down, or something like that.

DR: I have no idea what Jim's going to do with it, but I've already like kind of formed my own ideas that I kind of want to pitch at him. I see Vurk as like an outcast of his own people, yet they have respect for him. I see him like that. I'd like to see what Jim does with it.

SW: When is the first issue out?

DR: It should be out this month. We turned it around very quickly.

SW: Stayed up all night doing this, right?

DR: Oh many, many a night. I did

"I SEE TECH AS VERY COOL AND COCKY AND SHE'S VERY SELF ABSORBED, BUT ALSO WITH A VERY FRIENDLY EDGE TO HER."

about 28 pages in about two weeks.
SW: How many pages a day were you doing between that and *Warriors*?
DR: I was doing sixteen page weeks for about four weeks.
SW: [laughs] Wow!
DR: Yeah, it was an amazing amount of work. I'm still like trying to recover. That was really, really cranking out the pages.
SW: When we were talking just before I turned on the recorder, you mentioned a fiance. With all the work, I'm kind of amazed that she knows what you look like!
DR: She's starting to wonder herself. She knows it's all for like...I ended up proposing to her so she's kind of like placated. It's like, well, I know eventually I'm going to see him because he's got to show up for the wedding. [laughs] I've been going out with her for five years and we got engaged last May. She's seen me basically go through every step of my career. She met me when I was doing Space Beaver, so she's been along for the long haul and she's been very patient and supportive.
SW: You're a lucky man.
DR: She doesn't like not seeing me very much, but she's very understanding that I can only see her like on the weekends, if that, but she's been very patient.
SW: And of course all this work you're doing is just solidifying your space in the pro world too.
DR: I'm hoping...it seems like it is. I seem to have gotten a much better response over the last year by doing all this work, and I seem to feel that I have a footing now where I didn't before. I feel like I'm going to be able to stay in this business now. For a long time it was like, where's that next job going to come from? But I'm hoping that all the work I'm doing will just...my main reason for working so hard, at least, is I really like to draw. Even when I was doing sixteen page weeks, I was still enjoying what I was doing. It was just tiring. Physically I didn't like it, but mentally I was loving it. I love the challenge of trying to produce all these books. Increasing my speed has kind of brought out a different aspect of my art. I'm drawing much more from the gut now, and doing that you don't really sit there and think out layouts, you just go with it.
SW: It's not as much as an intellectual exercise.
DR: Right, but it was a way because I had to think of a good layout quickly. So I would draw from the gut and I really like that. Sometimes it would work, sometimes it wouldn't. If it didn't work I'd start over, but most of the times I would get something that I liked and then I could keep moving forward. I enjoyed that, but I'm hoping that people will like my work enough that when I do my own projects next year they'll be interested, that I will have built up enough of a reputation that they will come to expect something that they'll like. That's my main thing. My biggest fear is just apathy.
SW: I think that's everybody's major fear, at least everybody who's got any kind of creative talent.
DR: Yeah, I would imagine. I would rather be hated than just ignored. It's not an ego thing as much as it is as I really just want to keep this channel for expression open.
SW: That makes sense. You were saying a lot of the stuff you were doing when you were doing sixteen pages in a week was gut inspired. Would you say that that would give *the Solution* a more visceral kind of feel?
DR: When you see *Nightman* #1, you'll see a lot more attention to background and detail and characters, you know every little thing is drawn a little more perfectly; whereas with *Solution*, although I put a lot of work into the background and the characters, I found other ways of how to do it quickly. And yeah it is more visceral. I think there's more energy and it's good because the pacing is different. *Solution* is much more action, a story. So drawing these really hard fighting characters, and drawing them quickly, I think, gives them more movement and more of an edge.
SW: Well, I'm looking forward to it. I'll see the book for sure because I'm down at my local shop for all of the Ultraverse books as they come out. I've been curious. I've been enjoying it.
DR: Thank you. I'm glad to know that. I don't know why I'm thanking

"EVEN WHEN I WAS DOING SIXTEEN PAGE WEEKS, I WAS STILL ENJOYING WHAT I WAS DOING."

you, but I'm glad to know that you're enjoying it. I feel very personally attached to it because I had a lot to do with designing and stuff like that. I'm glad to hear people responding well to it because I think it's good actually. Even if I wasn't involved in it I'd still say I think they're doing a good thing, and I think they're trying to do comics that are meant to be pure entertainment, but good quality entertainment.

SW: You know what they remind me of? Have you ever seen any of the old Marvels from the '60s? It's kind of like that updated to the '90s.

DR: In fact, a lot of people during the Ultra conference last June were saying this feels very much like the bullpen and the days of the '60s, people that were around then. They really feel that this is like a good rebirth for the industry, that people are kind of getting back to the roots but using the knowledge of the present.

SW: What do you think of the stuff Image is putting out?

DR: My biggest problem with a lot of the Image stuff is that I don't get any personality from any of their characters, they're basically vehicles to show off what incredibly talented action artists the guys that head it up are. You see these great Jim Lee drawings, or a guy who draws just like Jim Lee, doing these characters and it's like it's nice to look at the pictures but I want to be drawn in, I want to know who these characters are. I want to know why this guy does what he does. I want to know how he feels when he uses his power. I want to know what he wears to bed at night. I want to know what he eats for breakfast.

SW: Yeah and from the first issue of say Prime...

DR: You find out this stuff.

SW: You know the kid. You know the people in his life, but the story never stood still for a second.

DR: And I thought that was really cool. The same with *Freaks*. You found out a lot about those characters right away. *Freaks* was probably my favorite read of the Ultraverse, of the ones that have been released. I like Mantra a lot too. And everybody's kind of doing their own thing, which I think is interesting. None of those books really reflect one another, whereas it seems to me the Image universe is very dependent on one another.

SW: And with Ultraverse, they're all in the same universe but it's not like they're tripping over each other.

DR: Right. Again, I'm not slamming the Image guys in any way, it's just what I want from a comic I don't really get from their work. I think there are a lot of people that feel that way that read comics, I think that's why Ultraverse is doing well and why it will continue to do well. Their main goal is quality comics. They want comics to be the best they can be. They want the Image quality print, and they want that beautiful coloring, and they want to get good artists, and then at the same time there's devotion to story. So they can sell it on every angle. I think that's exciting. I like that concept a lot. I like the forward thinking behind that. They're good people, too, they're nice people to deal with.

SW: What do you think of the idea of the Ultra-monthly, which isn't a hype sheet at all, but is almost like a news magazine that's printed in the actual Ultraverse?

DR: I like the idea of it. I haven't read it yet so I can't really form an opinion but I think it's a fun idea to kind of bring that reality more to life.

SW: It gives the reader a chance to be someone who's buying the Ultraverse equivalent of Time magazine, and reading the news stories and the interviews with the characters, just like they were real.

DR: I think that aspect adds an interesting dimension since we are as a society, our society, so media-controlled anyway.

SW: You wouldn't know if there's anything about the Solution going to be appearing in there?

DR: It wouldn't surprise me, but I don't know.

SW: No one has commissioned you to do any art for it or anything?

DR: Not yet, but *Solution's* just now getting off the ground, and I think they're more concerned with getting the book out than anything. I have been asked to do a *Solution* issue #0,

"IT'S LIKE IT'S NICE TO LOOK AT THE PICTURES BUT I WANT TO BE DRAWN IN, I WANT TO KNOW WHO THESE CHARACHTERS ARE."

which is going to be a special give-away with coupons or whatever. It's going to be a splash-page action book, which I'm looking forward to drawing.

SW: Which reminds me I'm still waiting for my #0 issue from the coupons from the last one I sent in about two months ago.

DR: For the Hardcase thing?

SW: I think that was what it was.

DR: I wouldn't know, but I'm sure you'll get it eventually.

SW: That was the one with the Jim Lee cover.

DR: They may not have been printed yet. I don't know.

SW: So now you're up to date. We know about virtually everything that you've got on the fire right now. You mentioned though that after the Solution there was a project, or projects.

DR: Yeah, there's two projects I'm wanting to get going next year. As soon as I finish my run on New Warriors and Solution, I'm going to start out and kind of do my own writing. Again, I did some writing. I wrote *Space Beaver* years ago, and the people who read it liked it, it just wasn't getting any attention at the time because the black-and-whites were dying out. So I got some experience writing that and I did a little bit of writing for Marvel, and it's fun and I've gotten good response to it. When the whole thing with Nightman fell through I realized the reason I was getting so uptight about the way Steve was presenting the character was because I had stories in me that I felt should be told. So I'm going to take a chance in creating my own character, and I'm going to tell my own stories. The character's name is Ripfire, and that's kind of like the banner for the book. It's a long evolutionary story. It's going to go through three major changes of the character. He starts out as this punk kid that's hanging out with his friends in a small town in Arizona, and it takes him to becoming almost a demi-god of the underworld, to kind of a Christ-like savior. What he does is...God, this is going to take forever to explain but I'll give it a shot. It's complicated if you try to put in a nutshell, but it makes perfect sense when you're reading it. Hopefully.

"I'M GOING TO TAKE A CHANCE IN CREATING MY OWN CHARACHTER, AND I'M GOING TO TELL MY OWN STORIES."

These aliens from another planet, their planet is dying. In their mad scramble for technology and clairvoyance, they've kind of managed to let their planet slip away. Once they figured out how to create this utopian society, it was too late to save their own planet. It was dying of...it had like radiation leaks all over the place, and the environment was completely screwed. So what they had to do was escape with what little of their society was left, and that was only about 500,000 people. They loaded them into these huge arks and what they did is they sent their consciousness...they discovered Earth because, you know that satellite that just went around Mars and then we lost it? Well, in my story it's going to show up on their planet, and that's going to provide them a link to our planet--well, they have this technology and they'll learn all about us through this machine and they're going to figure out how to get back to it. It's going to slip through a wormhole. So they're going to come through that wormhole on arks, and they're going to send their consciousnesses in little glass tubes because their bodies would never survive such a long journey, and even when they got to our planet, it's going to be a completely different atmosphere so how in the world could could they possibly survive? I always hated it when aliens would come to our planet and they'd just walk around breathing oxygen. And so they're

"I ALWAYS HATED IT WHEN ALIENS WOULD COME TO OUR PLANET AND THEY'D JUST WALK AROUND BREATHING OXYGEN."

going to get to our planet in these little glass tubes and basically they're suspended consciousnesses, they're in little electrical clouds, and they float in these tubes. When they land, they land out in the middle of the desert where this guy, this young punk, Matt McKinney, and his friends are like getting drunk on top of a butte and they see the ships coming down and they're just mesmerized. They can't believe what they're witnessing. So the ships land and a bunch of the aliens come out and they'll like basically be their own missionaries. They meld minds, I guess, is the best way I could describe it. They touch the minds of these kids. They say, look, this is our story, and they explain to them what happened, why they're here, and they say, what we need is your bodies. If we can take you over and basically be the driver and put you in the back seat for a little while we can get ourselves set up here. We've come with the secrets to save your planet. We know we can cure all your major diseases. We can create water where there is none. We can really help you. You'll go down as the heroes in history for allowing us to...for helping us. They're like well, sure. We got nothing to lose. Most of them were like hating their lives anyway. They're stuck in this little small town and they have nothing to do half the time anyway. So they say sure yeah. That would be great. And because they've touched minds they can sense that this is real, that they're not being lied to. But the main thing is, they say, while we're inhabiting your bodies, the main thing is nothing can touch or harm these ships because they're the remnants of our civilization, our planet is dead now and we can't ever go back--this is it. So we can't allow you...nobody can bother these ships. You have to protect these ships. So they go okay, we can deal with that. The aliens take over their minds and they start settling in. They start taking soil samples, learning about the planet. In the meantime people have come out looking for these kids because now they've been missing for awhile, and they discover these ships and immediately the army's called in. It's a big mediafest and it's like the David Koresh thing--there's this standoff. The army wants to know what these ships are and who's in them, and what this is all about. It's a really ugly standoff and the General doesn't believe these kids because they're known for having bad reputations. So he thinks it's just some kind of strange prank on their part and they're working with possibly another country. The General says, even if I went so far as to say I believe you, this could still be like a Trojan horse for an alien race that could take us over. We have to get inside those ships. We have to see what's inside. You're not going to stop this. They have this really advanced technology and weaponry so when the fight starts it should be really...and this is like an eight issue build-up to just the fight alone. So when the fight starts between the army and this small group of people it's spectacular because you're basically seeing twelve people take on an army and holding their own. I'm hoping to have developed all the characters, human and alien, so it's very dramatic when they are killed, which inevitably they are, because you know twelve people still can't beat an army, especially with the technology. So it's a massive battle and a couple of stinger missiles end up getting launched and that's it. The only person that manages to get away is Matt/alien and he's wounded and he manages to escape out into the desert unseen. He thinks he's the only survivor and he pretty much is right. He comes back to the site after the hoopla is over and everybody thinks everybody's dead, and the army is starting to pull out. There's this small guard around the ships and he gets inside one of the ships and the main guy, the leader or whatever, he's dying and he says, all right now it's up to you. You have the knowledge that we tried to bring to this planet and you've got to keep it alive. You're the last of our race. If you don't keep our knowledge alive then it dies with you. Now he's got a mission on earth. And his only guide is Matt McKinney, this punk kid, and they communicate within his mind. They share the mind. Well what should I do if I'm going to change the world? Well, I don't know. Matt's a 17-year old kid. What does a 17-year old kid know about saving

the world? But he says, well you know Superman, this is what he did, or this is what Batman would do. Then there's Ultra people and this is what they do, and Hardcase...so he'll explain it like that. He goes okay, maybe I could do things by stopping people, stopping crime. He hops on a motorcycle that's been left on the site. The name of the motorcycle that's painted on the side is Ripfire, and that's where he grabs his name. He says, well, this is who I'll be now, since I'm no longer who I was. So he starts travelling on a motorcycle through wherever his adventures take him. First I was going to send him to one city, then I thought it would be a lot more interesting if he travelled to different cities, then that way there's a lot more story potential. He's fighting crime, he's doing all the cool stuff, but he starts to feel that maybe just punching people isn't really going to solve anything. He has to really try to do something to make a difference. As things progress he infiltrates the underworld, he finds a way of stealing from the mafia and he takes that money and sets up homeless shelters and clinics. This is like the third evolution of the character. He starts setting up clinics and homeless shelters and he starts taking kids off the street and training them in a Guardian Angel kind of way. They start becoming little roving packs of gangs for good. They're like gangbangers, but now they're like protecting people as opposed to victimizing them. He's like, imagine Batman instead of with one Robin, Batman with many Robins, so that's what he ends up becoming. He's finding ways of making the world a better place. He's infiltrating things. People would speak of him in whispered terms. There'd be like a scene in a homeless shelter and some guy is like trying to sell smack to some of the other homeless guys to get them back on the addiction. In comes Ripfire and he's just shadows in the doorway and oh my God it's him. He's only spoken about in hushed terms. I think it's an interesting story.

"WHAT DOES A 17-YEAR OLD KID KNOW ABOUT SAVING THE WORLD? BUT HE SAYS, WELL YOU KNOW SUPER-MAN."

SW: It's different.

DR: I think I have an opportunity to do a lot of action and yet make it cerebral. I'm sorry it was such a long shpiel, but it's hard to condense it into a nutshell. But I do have a definite direction and each story, each step of the way, will be interesting, and it's not just going to be like build-up, each thing is going to have a purpose. Each stage you're going to be finding out about something hopefully you'll care about. And I do think it is different in the regard that it's not a super-hero with an easy motive. It's a super-hero with a mission, and he's only super in the regard that the technology advances him. He's got this incredibly alien knowledge and that's about all. So I'm trying to show people the power of the mind as well.

SW: You mentioned two projects.

DR: The other one I'm actually only illustrating and helping create the designs on. My very good friend Matt Weinhold is a professional stand-up comedian, and also a brilliant guy. He's not just funny, he's very well read. He's come up with a super-hero vampire team that we were going to do for the Ultraverse, but when Barry Windsor decided to do Rune that kind of put a damper on that, because

apparently he wants to be the only guy doing vampires in the Ultraverse. And you know nobody is going to say no to Barry Windsor-Smith, and nobody should. So because of that it kind of excluded us from doing our idea in the Ultraverse, but it turns out that Malibu will be starting a creator-owned line so we're going to do it through them. They've already offered us that avenue for being published. I'm very excited about that. It's called Coven. It's basically a story about vampires that regain some of their humanity but keep all the powers of a vampire, and what their purposes are. Matt's thought it all out. He's got the purpose of the vampires, where they come from, why they're on Earth, or why vampires exist on Earth. It's very interesting, very well thought out, and I'm really excited about that. It involves five characters and it almost works in like an X-Men kind of way. There's prejudice against vampires, and the fact that they're good vampires makes them also victims of bad vampires. So they're persecuted from two ends because they're neither one or the other. They're main guy is like the traditional Dracula type vampire--very regal and very

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old world. He's like their Professor Xavier. He's always treated the people around him like a family, whereas other vampires take humans and make them into sex slaves and things like that. He actually just was lonely and he created a family around him. He's gathered people over the years to kind of be his family. One of the characters, and they come from different time periods, one of them is a wolfman type...vampires can take the shape of a wolf, this guy always does. He just prefers that shape. He was actually killed during the Civil War or bitten during the Civil War so he's like an old rebel, and he carries a shotgun, and he talks like a cracker, but he's also like the muscle of the team. Then there's a guy named Rabbit who was bitten during the '50s, like a '50s greaser, and his ability is that he's got complete control over vermin. It's pretty interesting actually, his powers are going to be real exciting. If he wants to fly somewhere, he can summon many bats to latch onto him and fly him around. If he wants to get around, he tends to travel around on a sea of rats, on this undulating sea of rats. It's going to be like a horror and super-hero book combined. Then there's another character and she was like a prostitute in the '40s, and her ability is she can summon corpses to fight for her, clawing out of the ground and then fighting for her. Imagine a woman with an army of zombies. Then also we have a weird psychological thing with her that she only uses men corpses and she likes to humiliate them and really gets off on using them the way she was used when she was a prostitute. There're really interesting little things we can delve into with the characters. Then also we have a character who's like the spiritual anchor of the team and her name is Gospel, and Gospel is a Jehovah's Witness that came knocking on the wrong door one day during her mission and that's how she got bitten. When she regains some of her humanity she's in a horrible crisis because she was this religious person and now she's living her life as a vampire, so she hates herself. She has a lot of self-loathing, so in order for her to kind of like purge that she becomes like the spiritual anchor for the team--the voice for goodness.

SW: What's the leader's name?

DR: I don't remember offhand. It's just like Edward something the III. He doesn't really have a super-hero name, he just has a name. He's like the leader vampire. He ends up sending them out on missions and he kind of just shows up in the aftermath, very good my children, you know that kind of thing. So we're developing that now and they seem very interested. So I'm excited and also I'm excited because Matt's a really good writer and he's just starting to get his stuff out there, but I think once people see this they'll be impressed. He's been writing for television, things like that, all along. He's been on television, so he's got a lot of knowledge, and he's a comic book fan. He's a real big fan of the Vertigo stuff.

SW: I could probably have guessed that.

DR: Right, that's where a lot of his writing's going to go. It's going to be nice because it'll be an opportunity for me to work on different levels, too.

SW: When does your run with *New Warriors* end?

DR: Issue #50 at this point, unless something gets too crazy before then and I have to leave earlier, but I'm not planning to.

SW: Then you have the five issues of *the Solution*.

DR: That's why I don't want to commit to any more, because I've got these other two things that I really want to do. So now this line, they want to do creator-owned titles with Image quality, but with less hassle and more organized.

SW: What's the name of the line?

DR: As far as I know it's just Malibu's creator-owned line. I don't know if it'll have it's own imprint or not.

SW: Looks like you're on the verge of becoming one of those happy few who makes a better than good living out of comics.

DR: Well, I hope. That would be nice.

SW: While enjoying the work and just plain having fun.

DR: Well, I am definitely having fun and I think that's one of the reasons I'm getting so stretched out, because I have such a ravenous desire to cre-

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ate in this field and I love it so much. I still think there's so much potential in this medium that whereas a lot of creators have abandoned the super-hero market, I'd like to be able to show something new being done with super-heroes, I would really feel that I'd accomplished something great in life. I have such a love for the super-hero genre, even though a lot of people pooh-pooh it once they get to a certain level, but I think you got to keep going through the doors of your imagination. Look at what Alan Moore accomplished with *Watchmen* and *Miracle Man*, and what Frank Miller accomplished with *Dark Knight*.

SW: And also to some extent with Daredevil.

DR: Definitely with Daredevil. People will go, well, super-heroes are dumb, you can't do anything with super-heroes, it's just people in long underwear, that's ridiculous. Yes, because that's the attitude you take with it. If you're taking the attitude that it is ridiculous, well then it will be. But if you consider, for instance, why would these guys put on a uniform? Well, because he wants to be a symbol, so that people would have something to identify with. That's what those things work as. They become symbols, they become icons. Knowing that, if you had the powers and you wanted to be identified as something, yes, you would eventually put on a uniform, just like we put on uniforms today. We know what a policeman looks like. We know what a fireman looks like.

SW: Or a mailman for that matter.

DR: Or a mailman, exactly. Uniforms are essential. So if we lived in a reality where people had powers, yes there is a reason for a uniform. Also we've already seen these characters work as celebrities within their universes, so, yeah, celebrities would also have their own fashions. Look at the way actors and actresses dress compared to everyday people.

SW: Madonna being the most classic example.

DR: Or Cher. They come out in these outrageous costumes, they come out with these images, they want to be this person. So, yeah, I could see that happening within the mind of the super-hero as well.

Wiebe Bio: Sheldon Wiebe is a freelance journalist who reviews books for the Calgary Herald and has done work for the late, lamented Amazing Heroes, Mark One. His review of CBS' The Flash appeared in TV Guide (Canada) and he recently sold a Mr. No back-up story to Darick Gross.